

Captive Audience

We could become a society of prisons. If that 24-year old boy in Boulder, Colorado wins the suit against his mother and father for "malpractice of parenting," there'll be none of us loose.

The young man has charged his parents with neglect of his needs for clothing, food, shelter and psychological support "at critical periods." Who among us will not be incarcerated if this catches on.

The case hasn't been tried yet but it will be. Though it's too early to panic — plan which bunk we'll tease for in the cell, it's high time we recognize how vulnerable parents are.

No wonder fewer people are having children. The baby in the cradle could bring you to court. We're liable.

Watch for these legal pitfalls:

Your request to a child to take out the garbage may be in violation of the child labor law. "Borrowing" your daughter's skirt may result in a

charge of grand theft, with additional penalties if you finally return it with a snagged zipper.

A mere misdemeanor may come of your using the teenager's name brand shampoo, especially if the cheap store brand was available to you.

Your insistence on using the bathroom when your son's been in there for three-quarters of an hour may be a violation of his privacy.

The child whose croup turned into pneumonia might decide to sue his mother for ineffective medical treatment. (Mind you he probably was jumping up and down in puddles with his sneakers on between the illnesses.)

A neglect suit could be brought by a 13 year old if his parents went to an R movie and refused to take him along.

The judge might determine parents had failed to provide proper clothing if the third child shows up in court with the jacket handed down from his oldest brother.

The child who believes he's had to do more housework than his siblings might pursue litigation on complaints of unfair labor practices within the home.

If your little girl is refused new jeans because she doesn't need them, and you meanwhile have bought a pair for her brother, she may charge "You don't love me." Prepare for an alienation of affection suit.

When children appeal their case before you in a show cause hearing saying, "Everybody else gets to stay out till 11," and you still refuse permission, you may have denied their basic human rights, constitutionally guaranteed.

Don't send them to their rooms without supper; don't threaten to wash their mouths out with soap; don't make them take a bath. You don't need a charge of cruel and abusive treatment lodged against you.

And for goodness sake, don't force a teenager to take his younger brother or sister with him to the movies or there'll be two warrants out for your arrest.

But hold on before you answer those charges. If the case of the child against the parent has merit, is there not warrant for a countersuit. What child reared within the history of mothers and fathers has met all expectations (on the report card); filled all commitments (to clean his room); kept all promises (to stay out of trouble).

I know one woman who said, "I still don't have my children doing what I want them to do." And her babies are full-fledged adults. What's the charge for failure to follow the path in life your parents outlined for you? Is there a breach of promise action parents will pursue if they drop out of college or don't pass an exam?

Can a father sue a son if he can't use his own car anymore and gets it back only when the gas tank is empty? Shall parents and children take one another to court for embarrassment they cause one another? A mother could sue the child for humiliation if he slurps his food in a restaurant. And he could file suit when she tells everyone about it.

But we musn't do this. Being a family member carries an inherent responsibility to tolerate one another. You have to show mercy when someone eats all the meat that was for supper. And if it's privacy one hankers there's little in an active family.

Who would be the judge in courts where children and parents tried one another. The judge himself would be vulnerable if he had been either a child or a parent. So would the jury. Surely an "Amicus Curiae" (Friend of the Court) would remind us we're pretty lucky for the most part and should be acquitted from guilt.

Let the evidence show that for every time we're entitled to complain, there are countless days we owe a vote of thanks to family members. Few of us owe one another apologies in court otherwise for what we've tried to do in growing and in being grown. The basic law governing family behavior is simply to love one another. Happiness is dependent on the wise application of that law. And it's one of the few that can't be legislated or enforced. It's only a gift, from parents to children.

What we don't need is a prison for parents with visitation rights from the children's jail on Sundays. Besides there'd be no paperboy to deliver the Sunday paper and no Dad to drive him in foul weather.



By Lois Martin

By John Cutler

□ Maybe you shouldn't expect to have fun if you take yourself to a party.

□ One reason some motor inns charge more than others is the price of the towels patrons steal.

□ Isn't it time the Buddhists, Shintoists and Muslims held an ecumenical council?

□ The beer of champagnes is better than the champagne of beers.

□ Wear one watch. If you have two, you are not sure what time it is.

□ One of the most courageous guys I ever heard of is the one who changed seats in a canoe in an alligator-infested swamp in the Everglades. The other is the one who changed seats with him.

□ The person who brags of being so unmechanical wants you to think it's because he is brilliant.

□ A lawyer who depends on a computer has a tool for a client.

□ I was never really insulted until this elephant offered me peanuts.

□ The first icepick manufacturer who became a millionaire was the first who started manufacturing ice trays.

□ Stop complaining about North and South Dakota. Suppose there were East and West Dakotas?

□ One definition of a politician: a man who stands for what he thinks others will fall for.

□ It's time the Governor's Council seceded from Patrick

(Sonny) McDonough. What a book we could write, Pat. Say When.

□ A nurse removed the tray after bringing John Barrymore a meager lunch. "Bring me a postage stamp," John said. "I think I'll do a little reading."

□ Sharon King can come to my party any time, and she

can bring Jack Chase with her. But you stay home, Jack Cole.

□ Yep, we know how to split words, but our computer doesn't. Which explains why you see one line ending with "stre-" and the next beginning with "ngth."

□ We like united appeal funds that put all their begs in one ask it.

...Musings



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